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ABSTRACT

Statistics indicate that women are steadily moving into formerly male-dominated professional and managerial jobs. Overall, women are making progress into professional jobs for which education is a major prerequisite. Traditionally, sex roles in society have been socially constructed. According to the perceived stereotypical response, males and females develop appropriate traits that are different and therefore the behaviors and tasks performed by both are basically separate. This perceived condition is the result of a deeply entrenched pervasive culture that keeps women defined not by their intellectual capabilities but rather by their childbearing abilities and by their status as companions for men. One method of researching the actual and perceived differences between men and women has been achieved by researching androgyny. It is presumed that androgynous people have in their repertoire a broader array of effective behavioral options to use across situations than people using traditional sex role behaviors. Androgyny has not worked in the business setting due to society's stereotypical responses to women who become too aggressive and men who become too sensitive. One solution to correct the problems caused by gender inequalities in the workplace may be to accept the concept of comparable worth, which holds that pay should be the same for jobs that require comparable skills, efforts, and responsibilities. Studying other methods to eliminate the "glass ceiling" in organizations is another possible solution. Another solution is to find new methods to communicate in order to eliminate traditional stereotypical roles. Equal roles for men and women are forthcoming, but only after years of hard work and education. (ABL)

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[The Changing Role of Women in Business:

A Study of Sex-Role Stereotyping]

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Purpose:

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the changing role of women in organizations and the gender differences that cause women to be placed in stereotypical roles. I will also analyze the significance of gender-type studies, primarily androgyny and the problems with sex role stereotyping. In addition, I will tie both questions together by evaluating the communication and behavioral traits of women as well as suggest some possible solutions to the conflict of gender differences in organizations.

Regardless of the explanation, employment records of the 1980s unmistakably point to the continued existence of pink ghettos in the world of work, i.e., low paying, female-dominated jobs (Arliss 171). Traditionalists speculate that women chose not to pursue advancement opportunities in order to avoid excessive work-related pressure (24). Still others cite the failure of affirmative action legislation to correct a situation of obvious and illegal discrimination. The Department of Labor statistics indicate that, while women are steadily moving into male-dominated fields, the number of women moving to traditionally female dominated fields reflects a parallel growth (U.S. Department of Labor 2080). Statistics show that women are steadily moving into formally male-dominated professional and managerial jobs (Carroll 398). Today, women's hourly wages total only 78 percent of men's wages (Garland 33). In fact, most research indicates that women are not paid the same as their male counterparts (33). Part of this problem reflects women's' choices in jobs and the fact that women usually have less seniority than men.

Overall, women are making progress into professional jobs for which education is a major prerequisite. In 1972, about four percent of MBA

graduates were women. In 1987, this figure was 33 percent. In 1972, women occupied 20 percent of management and administrative jobs. This figure grew to 37 percent in 1987 (Business Week 75). This indicates that there is every reason that women will continue to progress into the managerial ranks. However, in spite of this progress, women are hitting a "glass ceiling" in their jobs and are not able to penetrate the upper echelons of management. According to a survey of over 1000 CEO's, 79% acknowledged that women face barriers advancing to top management and suggest that women continue to face two big hurdles: Stereotyping and an unwillingness to risk promoting a woman (Garland 33). "While men deny the existence of a glass ceiling, recent surveys indicate that it does exist and women are paid considerably less than their male counterparts" (33).

Traditionally, sex roles in our society have been socially constructed. According to Stewart, men and women differ substantially on a wide variety of personality traits, attitudes, and interests. Stewart also states that traditional sex roles encourage stereotyping that creates a division by a person's sex for work and family responsibility (17). These socially constructed sex roles create psychological differences as well as perceptions about "normal" occupational roles. According to the perceived stereotypical response, males and females develop appropriate behavioral traits that are different and therefore the behaviors and tasks performed by both are basically separate (18).

This perceived condition is the result of a deeply entrenched pervasive culture that keeps women defined not by their intellectual capabilities but rather by their childbearing abilities and by their status as companions for men (147). Stewart claims that women may work outside the home, but traditional

sex roles dictate that their primary commitment is to their role within the home (218).

These beliefs create a stereotypical response to and a negative presence for women who wish to succeed in business. The stereotypical roles create an atmosphere that suggests women are warm, passive, nurturing, and cannot be aggressive, intellectual or independent (45). In fact, most organizations value the active, aggressive, and instrumental behavior of men (46).

Some business leaders claim that women are too sensitive and not strong enough to handle important clients or problems (Carroll 193). Yet, these women are also typecasted as "bitches" if they become strong or aggressive. The two-sided dilemma (called the double-bind theory) does not allow women to function effectively as business leaders because they are subject to criticism no matter what behavioral traits they utilize. According to Wood and Conrad, the double bind of their being too masculine or too feminine is not easily resolved for most women. Ultimately, women may be able to overcome the preconceived notion that they are not born leaders. Arliss suggest that a woman who is currently serving in management continues to encounter the inherent paradox- the double bind- that demands she pay a price for her behavioral choices: if she acts too capable, she risks being perceived as unfeminine; if she acts too feminine, she risks being perceived as incompetent (181). Some studies, such as the one conducted by Hagen and Kahn, report that competent women may be perceived as unpleasant and be excluded from groups within the organization due to their behavioral traits (50).

In 1973, Schein claimed that successful managers and men were perceived to possess leadership ability, competitiveness, aggressiveness, and to desire motivation to succeed and thus their pay, based on these skills, was higher.

Only a few managerial behaviors were associated with women- employee centeredness, understanding, helpfulness, and intuition. Therefore, as Schein concludes "all else being equal, the perceived similarity between the characteristics of successful middle managers and men in general increases the likelihood of a male rather than a female to be promoted to a managerial position" (99). This attitude towards women can be traced over the years and can even be seen in today's businesses. In addition to valuing traditional masculine behaviors more than traditional feminine behaviors, traditional sex-role stereotypes hold that men are more competent at task accomplishment than women (Stewart 218). For example, many business leaders state that men are more successful in organizations and treated more highly than women. "The field of management is perceived as a masculine activity and although more women are assuming management positions, they are perceived as being less competent than their male counterparts and thus given less pay and fewer promotions" (Fink et. al. 3). Therefore, these perceived differences encourage organizations to place women in traditional positions instead of promoting or advancing them to management positions.

Men and women do act and communicate differently. There are actual communicative differences between men and women. Studies show that women's speech typically tends to be more person-oriented and concerned with interpersonal matters and men's speech tends to involve straight factual communication (Stewart 122). Tag questions and qualifiers are used more often by women. Because women use these tag questions and qualifiers to communicate, society has stereotyped them as passive communicators. Research shows that women can be better communicators because of these differences (122). In addition, researchers maintain that women's speech

contains more hedges, such as "well," "you know," and "kinda" then men's speech (56). "Women are associated with the use of deferential language. Deferential language is characterized by the use of tag questions, qualifiers, hedges and other forms of speech traditionally associated with women's language" (58). By using speech hedges and tag questions, women may convey the message that they are unsure of their statements accuracy. The differences between the genders may not be significant, but social orientation that governs society's behavior that places women into specific roles is significant.

One method of researching the actual and perceived differences between men and women has been achieved by researching androgyny. In the early 1970's, studies on androgyny and gender stereotypes flourished (Arliss 15). Androgyny is conceptualized as the presence of both masculine and feminine traits. It is presumed that androgynous people have in their repertoire a broader array of effective behavioral options to use across situations than people using traditional sex role behaviors. Since androgyny allows greater flexibility and adaptability in a variety of situations, having androgynous characteristics can make women and men more successful in interpersonal and business situations than using traditional masculine and feminine roles (Bem 156).

In nearly all studies cited, androgyny was measured by the use of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), a list of 60 personality characteristics. A person indicates on a seven point scale how each of the 20 masculine, 20 feminine, and 20 neutral personality characteristics describe him or herself. According to Bem's scoring method, the androgyny score is obtained by using a t-ratio for the difference between a person's masculine and feminine scores. The closer the difference score is to zero, the more androgynous the person is.

In 1978 by Wiggins and Holzmuller, 187 University of Oregon students were asked to rate the self applicability of 1,710 trait descriptive adjectives which broadly represented terms in the English language that describe stable, stereotypical personality traits (43). From this pool, a masculinity and femininity scale was assembled. Although it is based slightly on different terms, the measure of psychological androgyny used in this study is empirically equivalent to Bem's (49). Wiggins and Holzmuller found that androgynous women are significantly more dominant/ambitious than androgynous men. According to Stewart, these characteristics are reported to occur more in a business setting (45).

Wiggins and Holzmuller suggest that an androgynous person may have higher self-esteem than a person with traditional stereotypical characteristics and achieve higher success in a business setting (51). Ridley et al argues that one's perception of self as masculine and feminine is subject to change under certain conditions. He and other researchers assessed that the effects of problem solving skills on sex role stereotyping of pre-marital partners. They found that one group studied scored significantly higher on femininity after participating in the problem solving workshop. The individuals' who possessed expressive behaviors felt that they could successfully solve problems because they had these feminine behaviors. This study suggests that feminine characteristics are positively related to the problem-solving abilities needed in organizations.

Fagenson studied yet another variable regarding communication and gender: organizational power. In her study, men and women in upper and lower level jobs in a large corporation completed the masculine and feminine scales of the Spence and Helmreich (1978) Personal Attributes Questionnaire.

In support of the organizational perspective, perceptions of masculine attributes were found to be related to individuals' level in the organization power hierarchy: Upper level men and women reported possessing more masculine traits than did individuals at the lower levels. Fagenson found that perceptions of feminine attributes were related to individuals' gender: Women reported to be more feminine then men. She suggested that men may only reflect what their co-worker or supervisor wants instead of actually responding to the co-worker or supervisors' needs. This study suggests there is still a perception that masculine traits are needed by top management in order to succeed.

Spillman et. al. examined the dynamic relationship between sex and sex-type in leadership activities. Stereotyped sex role expectations for men and women in our society have led to the predictions that males are more likely to become leaders in business like situations. Men tend to be more aggressive and ambitious, whereas women tend to reflect on their interpersonal skills in business settings. These social conclusions, however, were only partially supported by the data.

Spillman et. al. found that women had significantly higher total leadership scores than males on task and social dimensions. However, androgynous persons had significantly higher task and social leadership scores than women. Apparently androgynous persons possess the ability to be flexible which allows them to be identified as leaders. This conclusion is interesting when we remember that females demonstrated this quality to a higher degree than males.

Davis and Gilbert in their study on the "Effect of Dispositional and Situational Influences on Women's Dominance Expression in Mixed-Sex

Dyads" claimed that feminine traits are radically different from that of masculine and androgynous traits. They stated that feminine characteristics allow an individual to be more socially sensitive than other behavioral characteristics (294). The results of these studies suggest that individuals recognize the value of feminine characteristics.

Androgyny has not worked in the business setting due to society's stereotypical responses to women who become too aggressive and men who become too sensitive. Although researchers have argued that an androgynous approach to management could eliminate sexual stereotyping and role bias in organizations, there does not appear to be any movement in that direction. The negative attitude towards women as managers continues as the success of women in organizations progresses.

Often in our society, women are expected to work in low status or submissive roles, while men are expected to assume high-status or dominant roles (Jackson 216). Many women inadvertently opt to behave like either a "non female professional" (too masculine) or "female professional" (too feminine). By using both masculine and feminine traits, women can adopt a flexible position that also allows them the skill of being assertive when necessary. Wood and Conrad point out that "a woman can clearly choose which role to assert in any given situation" (320).

According to some businesses, using both masculine and feminine traits will increase a person's chance at gaining a promotion or raise (Fisher 35). However, my research reveals that the mix may be unpredictable for women. If women do use both masculine and feminine traits, people with the deeply entrenched traditional stereotypes may not promote or pay women the same as men.

One solution to correct the problems caused by gender inequalities in the workplace maybe comparable worth. Comparable worth holds that pay should be the same for jobs that require comparable skills, efforts, and responsibilities (35). Female managers should earn the same as male managers with the same responsibilities. Comparable worth also states that certain jobs are paid less because they are traditionally held by women. Companies should also value the responsibilities and skills of both men and women.

Opponents of comparable worth are opposed because it would mean replacing market forces with regulation wage-setting boards. Employers also claim that making wage structures more equitable would disrupt the entire economic system of our country (ibid). However, with new laws being established, the message to business employers seems clear: Women and minorities are establishing a backing, and it is logical that management adhere to these public policies and attempt to fashion a program that will meet the needs of women. Government regulation may be considered as one possible way to eliminate setting different pay scales for men and women. Government workers are paid according to a scale based on years employed and education. This would eliminate the problems associated with pay differences between men and women as well as get rid of the pay ceiling for women.

Studying other methods to eliminate the "glass ceiling" in organizations is another possible solution. An overwhelming goal, however, should be to educate those individuals with preconceived negative ideas about women. It is vital that we encourage learning and education at all levels and to all people in order to promote the equality of men and women. I do not see a great deal of change for women in regards to pay or promotion unless active politicians and leaders take a stand towards eliminating the "glass ceiling."

Another solution is to find new methods to communicate in order to eliminate traditional stereotypical roles. Rhetorical sensitivity and supportive communication are such methods. Rhetorical sensitivity emphasizes changefullness and the mutual responsibility of communication (Ward et al 190). This human choice to be sensitive to others is characterized by male and female behaviors. A rhetorically sensitive person avoids rigid verbal behavior and communicates with regard to the situation or context. The individual also adapts his/her behavior to the audience (193). By utilizing supportive communication, a person aims to reduce defensiveness and to confirm the worth of others. Whatever the situation, a person who is flexible and adaptive may be more of an effective leader than those who are not (Carroll 198). If individuals utilize rhetorical sensitivity and supportive communication, they may be sensitive to the equal roles of men and women.

Women face many challenges as they compete against men in the workplace. Perceived differences still exist in some people's beliefs and values. The problems will steadily decrease as more young people become aware of the need for a change in our perception of women. Overall, these stereotypes are slow to change. Equal roles for men and women is forthcoming, but only after years of hard work and education.

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